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As Trump Entertainment Resorts executive Mark Juliano prepares to leave positions in the Atlantic City casino industry, two state lawmakers are touting him as the potential leader of a proposed new Atlantic City tourism district.

Trump corporate owners announced last week that Juliano would be replaced as chief executive

officer. As a result, Juliano also will eventually be replaced as president of the Casino Association of New Jersey. The changes mean that Gov. Chris Christie's administration is losing an Atlantic City point person who has coordinated much of the discussions about a new phase of state involvement in the resort.

Two legislators are naming Juliano as a candidate to lead a proposed Atlantic City tourism district, a new organization that would be a central part of Christie's plan to turn Atlantic City around.

"Mark was a linchpin in those discussions," said Assemblyman John Amodeo, R-Atlantic, one of the Republican lawmakers closely involved in the governor's plan.

Amodeo said he sees an opportunity to keep Juliano involved in a hands-on way: by putting his name forward to head the new partnership between casino and public interests, which Christie's advisers recommended should be led by a CEO.

"I've been floating this to everybody," Amodeo said. "If you think about the expertise we're looking for, I think he'd be an excellent fit."

Juliano, 55, of Haddonfield, Camden County, is the first name to be publicly suggested by a state lawmaker to lead the proposed district. He took over as president of the Casino Association in June, a month before Christie unveiled a series of recommendations that would build state involvement in Atlantic City's gaming resort, while cutting state and casino subsidies to horse racing.

He emerged as a key voice for the casinos in support of the governor's plan. Christie invited Juliano to early stakeholder meetings following publication of the recommendations and as the governor began to discuss how to enact them.

He also continues to serve as vice chairman of the board of directors for the Atlantic City Convention & Visitors Authority, or ACCVA.

Since Juliano was replaced by the company's new owners at Trump, Amodeo is not the only state lawmaker who wants to keep Juliano involved in the resort's transition.

"He could certainly have a key role in the new district," said state Sen. Jeff Van Drew, D-Cape May, Cumberland, Atlantic. "I'd be all for it, having known Mark and seen him as someone who knows how to bring the different casino properties together. He knows how to think outside the box."

Juliano said Tuesday that he did not know if his next career move would even keep him in Atlantic City.

"Obviously, for the next 30 to 60 days, I'm involved in this transition. And beyond that, I'm going to be looking at all the options available, and eventually I'll make a decision. If there are opportunities made available in Atlantic City, I'd be very considerate of them."

"No one has approached me formally or in an official way about any kind of role with the district," he added. "The structure of that new entity is still unclear to us, and something I'm not privy to."

The shape of the new district will affect the fate of the ACCVA, which advisers to Christie hope to fold into the new tourism district and incorporate into a new marketing and funding model for the resort.

"I will still be involved in discussions related to ACCVA," Juliano said. "But as of now, that's the only formal way I would stay active or have a say."

Choosing a casino executive to take the role of executive director of the private-public partnership would signal that private interests would take the lead in efforts to revitalize the gaming resort.

Amodeo said that made sense, because the revenue needed to provide additional services in the area will be paid for by casinos and other private revenue.

"I have always hoped that business would have the final say on who to hire and how to run the district, because they're the ones who'll have to pay the bills," Amodeo said.

Christie has ruled out using public money to foot the bill to make the area surrounding the casinos, Boardwalk and Marina District, in his words, "clean and safe." The plans to accomplish that are taking time because officials also are looking at how to overhaul casino regulations to make them simpler.

Staff at the Attorney General's Office and in the governor's legal department are researching the technicalities of how to implement a new regulatory structure.

Amodeo said he expects Christie to make an announcement about the district in the next two weeks, following an agreement Tuesday between the city and the state Department of Community Affairs allowing for state oversight of city finances.

A spokesman for Christie would not comment on how Juliano's departure would affect the progress of the state's plan, or whether Christie could see a role for Juliano in the district's leadership.

Juliano's immediate predecessor at the Casino Association, Joseph A.Corbo Jr., general

counsel of Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa, is the association's current vice president and may become interim president while a replacement is sought. An association meeting is expected in the next month. Corbo assisted with discussions between industry and state officials this spring, and met with the governor at Drumthwacket on July 22 to discuss the tourism district, as Juliano could not attend.

The association is the lobbying and trade group representing Atlantic City's 11 casino hotels.

State Sen. Jim Whelan, D-Atlantic, said he hoped Juliano would continue to have a role in shaping the resort. But he urged caution in speculating about names to lead the district.

"I think the world of Mark Juliano," he said. "But the process to work out what this district will be and how it will work should be allowed to play itself out, not through speculation."

Regardless of his departure from Trump and the association, Juliano said he believed Atlantic City had a chance to capitalize on its natural advantages.

"We have the great tax rate, the unbeatable location and the great physical infrastructure of all these large hotel and casino properties. So as we focus on bringing in those nongaming forms of entertainments, we can't forget that," he said. "Moving forward with that is a job for me, it's a job for my successor, and something everyone in Atlantic City should be concerned about working on."

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